



Honors Program 2017 Newsletter

MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY
<http://www.mwsu.edu/academics/honors/>

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY EDITION

WORD FROM THE NEW PROVOST



JAMES JOHNSTON
Photo by Arianna Davis

IT IS MY HONOR, and certainly a highlight of my career, to serve as Midwestern State University's new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. MSU is also my alma mater, and I consider it my home. I earned two degrees from here, taught here as a faculty member, and now

serve as an administrator. Mine is not a traditional path. I am a first generation student ever in my family to earn a college degree. I completed an associate's and began work as a radiographer. I completed my bachelor's and master's degrees during different stages of my career and my PhD while teaching as a faculty member here. I've lived and worked in a small community at a community college, and I've lived and worked in a large city at a very large hospital. I believe my story and my path allow me to relate in one way or another to many of the students we serve. I think this perspective is important as we evolve our student centered approach to education.

I believe you, as our honors students and alumni, are among the best of our student body. The programming you experience represents an investment on behalf of MSU in your future and what we believe you can achieve. It also provides unique opportunities to interact with faculty and experts on a number of topics and on a more personal level. I hope that you also value this opportunity and take part in all that the Honors Program has to offer.

For many reasons, I believe in our mission and who we are as Texas' COPLAC Public Liberal Arts University. The Honors Program represents significant parts of what we are about. I look forward to guest lecturing in some of the courses and meeting you all as you progress through the program. Most of all I look forward to greeting you on the commencement stage as successful graduates of the Redwine Honors Program and welcoming you as fellow alum!

James Johnston, Provost

Diversity Drives Faculty Panel at Honors Program Symposium



Left to right: Dr. Magaly Rincon-Zachary, Dr. Jeff Hood, and Dr. Salim Azzouz. Photo by Arianna Davis

BECAUSE of the media coverage of cultural diversity, Honors students chose to have a panel of professors discuss why cultural diversity benefits academic success as the keynote discussion topic at the 11th annual Redwine Honors Symposium on March 25, 2017.

Students chose Dr. Salim Azzouz, Associate Engineering Professor, Dr. Jeff Hood, Associate Professor of Math, and Dr. Magaly Rincón-Zachary, Biology Professor because of their diverse backgrounds and experiences with a variety of cultures.

Both Azzouz and Rincón-Zachary are naturalized American citizens and spoke about their travels across the world that led them to Wichita Falls, Texas.

Hood, on the other hand, as a Texas native, grew up less than a half hour away from the Mexican border and said he welcomed diversity into his life early on.

According to Hood, he couldn't "get enough" of the cultural influences he experienced as a child and wanted to learn everything about other cultures.

"I come from a fairly homogenous background where my family is almost entirely Scottish," Hood said. "While I am very hubris about my culture, I'm also able to take that hat off and put it on a shelf to accept whatever else is around me culturally like a blank slate."

While he grew up with a Scottish family, his childhood was spent in a small town in south Texas just 30 minutes away from the Mexican border where about 80 percent of the population was Mexican. Hood said he "very clearly remembers asking, 'Why do they have quinceañeras and we don't?'"

From that first acknowledgment, Hood said he noticed a sharp contrast in cultures of people even within the same town, and took a "divergent path" from continuing the separation and instead gravitated towards new cultures and experiences.

Fascinated by the similarities and stark differences each culture has, Hood began to experience cultures not only through interactions, but also through food, music and simply asking questions to those around him.

"I've been in academia for 22 years, and the higher up I got, the more I got to interact with people from other countries," Hood said.

Rincón-Zachary said she has also had many "eye opening experiences" along with her students that have "been impacted for the rest of their lives," yet the challenge in appreciating those experience lies in inclusion.

"After teaching for many years, I decided to become a naturalized citizen because I wanted to be heard, and I wanted to vote. The challenge to be a naturalized citizen here is appreciating the diversity the university offers because we have students from everywhere," Rincón-Zachary said. "The challenges are more evident today than ever before because of the toxic environment President Trump and his allies have created. I think we need to be cognizant of that and do something with that."

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DIVERSITY DRIVES FACULTY PANEL AT HONORS PROGRAM SYMPOSIUM

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Rincón-Zachary said she stresses the importance of engaging with different cultures because as she learned more about the varying cultures around her, she also gained an appreciation for her own Venezuelan culture. She realized she had grown desensitized to her own culture since she was surrounded by it.

"I became more aware of my own identity because I was exposed to other cultures and I wanted to know who I am," she said. "It's a comfort to know who I am, and I learned to love my country and how rich and beautiful it is."

More than anything, Azzouz said common goals bond people, and to learn about personal identity, most people reach beyond their comfort zones and seek out relationships unlike those familiar to themselves.

"The number one thing that keeps people away from one another is thinking you don't have anything in common," Azzouz said. "If you seek to find someone, even to help with a homework problem, you build those relationships that produce friendships."

But as relationships with other countries grow more hostile it seems, Hood said it's a matter of empathy for people to care about one another despite differences that drive wedges between cultures.

When Hood went to graduate school, he had one adviser from Russia whose wife was a Russian Jew, and because the attitude of Russia was that Jews were non-citizens, Hood's adviser and his wife had to be smuggled out of the country for safety.

Hood said the interactions were so profound to him because growing up in the U.S., the Russians were the enemy to be hated. Schools drilled into students that the Russians were eventually going to blow up America, and Hood said he found a hero in his Russian adviser; according to Hood, he was someone who was smart and effective enough to teach quantum physics to kindergarteners, if given the chance.

Another of Hood's advisers was from Ethiopia, and he quickly became like a second father to him, Hood said. That adviser eventually returned to his own country, and when it was time for him to go back, the country had changed so much that he had to seek political asylum.

"That right there is something that I can understand, but I will never, ever experience," Hood said. "I could only experience that through the empathy and love for my advisers. My exposure to other cultures became more abstract, and I began to empathize with people rather than sympathize."

Azzouz, Hood and Rincón-Zachary all said that through learning to appreciate other cultures, they have gained a greater understanding of their own lives. This demonstrates courage not only on their part, but for all those who have ventured into another culture.

"I am thankful for the cultural diversity I have experienced because it has expanded my horizons and I am very content with that," Rincón-Zachary said. "I'm pleased to have many colleagues that have had similar experiences. My experiences with other cultures have made me a better person, and what else can we ask from ourselves as we get older?"

The MSU campus helps to introduce various cultures into the Wichita Falls community. With students from over 53 different countries, this campus contains a variety of cultures, religions and backgrounds, and Azzouz, Hood and Rincón-Zachary emphasized the necessity for students to delve into programs that enrich students on various topics.

"I can't emphasize enough the importance of taking advantage of the opportunity MSU and the Honors Program offers students with study abroad," Rincón-Zachary said.

Rincón-Zachary also said the campus has a variety of diverse organizations that offer events that tell a lot about cultures, and she said students should take advantage of the opportunities provided to expand their minds to different lifestyles.

To combat viewpoints of those seeking to diminish relationships with other countries, Hood said people have to "make themselves available" to growth opportunities to better our society as a whole.

"Don't wait for those opportunities to come to you, but instead make yourself available to potential new friends," he said. "Everybody wants to be loved, and everyone wants to be respected and appreciated. If we keep those things in mind, then we all succeed in life."

Story written by Cortney Wood and originally published in The Wichitan.

Mustangs Show off Talents on Stage

A rush falls over the crowd of students as the stage light begins to shine on the choir lined up onstage. A quiet melody plays and the soft stream of the Sri Lankan national anthem graces the ears of the audience. As the anthem finishes, another, more familiar anthem begins to play and members of the audience join in singing “The Star Spangled Banner,” joining two cultures in a matter of minutes.

“This event was to get all the students together and bring all the cultures and all the diversity we have at MSU together,” Tharusha Wanigasekera, president of Sri Lankan Students Organization, said. “With different cultures, if people want to go and see and understand what cultures are around the world, this is a great opportunity to start things like that.”



Sachithra Weerasooriya, an Honors Program junior majoring in Physics and Math, dances in Sri Lankan traditional wear at the Mustangs On Stage Talent Show hosted by Sri Lankan Students Organization at Akin Auditorium on March 25th, 2017.

Photo by Timothy Jones

The SLSO hosted Mustangs on Stage, a talent showcase, on March 25, in Akin Auditorium. Bringing together a multitude of cultural diversity, the acts consisted of tribal dances, a fashion show, solo artists and a sing-a-long with the Baptist Student Ministry. The Sri Lankan cultural dances and the Indian cultural dance were brought to campus from Maryland dancer Sandali Chandradasa.

“I’ll just do it for fun, but I wasn’t very serious about it. I had a month to rehearse and prepare, but I am a mechanical engineering student, I work full time, I’m doing a EURECA project and I went to a couple of conferences during that time, so I didn’t get to rehearse until the Friday before my dance,” mechanical engineering senior Israel Ezeodum said.

According to their webpage, the SLSO’s purpose is to bring a cultural understanding to MSU. With about 22 members, the organization tries to create a sense of unity and a home for the Sri Lankan students on campus. Along with the SLSO, several faculty members helped organize the event, including mass communication instructor Sandra Grant.

“Dr. Glean [International Services Director] was there on Saturday morning on the stage. He came to support the students and to advise them on how to organize the show,” Salim Azzouz, Associate Professor of Engineering and the SLSO adviser, said. “His office picked up some of the expenses for Mustangs on Stage.”

Although hosted by the SLSO, many other cultures were represented in the talent show, including African, Arabic and Egyptian. Through each of them came the melting pot culture of America.

“It was definitely hard to teach them the choreography since it was mostly through FaceTime. Some had prior knowledge of dancing and some didn’t. They were amazing though, and learned the dancing pretty quickly,” Chandradasa said. “My favorite part was coming from such a large city and coming here and seeing such diversity in such a small town.”

Story written by Leah Bryce and originally published in The Wichitan.

FACULTY HIGHLIGHT

Our faculty highlight this year is on MSU's new Provost Dr. James Johnston. Johnston was named Provost in April of 2017. He has been involved with the Honors Program in various capacities in the past, most recently as a guest speaker in Honors Leadership MSU, and we are excited to have him as Provost.

FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIR AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR, to director of interdisciplinary education, to interim dean, to actual dean. University President Suzanne Shipley named James Johnston the new Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs on April 21. Johnston replaced Betty Stewart, who held the Provost position for more than four years.

Johnston carries the university's history with him as he's earned two degrees from MSU. He said the campus is like home to him and feels strongly about MSU's [standard]. His passion and vision for the university as a liberal arts school comes from his foundation.

"I've always felt that if we prepare students strictly for their major or area of interest, we grossly under prepare them for a career, a life of being engaged and a productive citizen," he said.

The Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs position is not a single member effort. This position consists of cooperative endeavors from academic deans, other vice presidents, and the university's president.

"In terms of management and leadership, the management part is the faster piece to get down and that's paperwork with day-to-day oversight of things," he said. "The leadership and visioning part is something that grows; it takes a little longer. It's a learning curve and it's not just my decision."

Johnston said he desires to strengthen the university's identity as a liberal arts school with everyone involved at this campus. He also said while there are other components that contribute to this school, he sees the academic perspective as the core element of why a student is at MSU. The education provided to excel is what makes his job significant.

He said, "The subject that [students] study, the first year experiences a student has in or outside the classroom like Enhancing Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities or the Study Abroad Program all tie back to [my] office. The continuous progress and improvement of the curriculum and creating new subject areas, new majors, new minors all track back here also."

There are four vice presidents at the university, and Johnston will oversee all academic related issues. The provost part of his title designates a second person in charge of the university in case the president is absent.

"It's a great responsibility, don't get me wrong, but it's still exciting," he said. "You feel like you understand how broadly you need to think and consider all the groups. When you step in it's like a freedom to pursue this. That's the exciting part for me, that you have the authority to move forward, to be creative and have the support."

Johnston said he hopes to work with faculty, department chairs and deans to specifically guide the curriculum and experiences for students. He also said he hopes students and others see what they have done as a unit at the end of the day.



James Johnston, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, gathers papers together for a guest speaking event. "I'm sure this won't be my last guest lecture. I have to get used to this now," Johnston said.

Photo by Honors Program student Kara McIntyre

"Each step forward really pushes you to think broader to consider an ever-larger group. The responsibility is greater, but the opportunity to find the connections and help grow the university is enjoyable," he said. "I miss being in the classroom, but being in the administration to guide and direct the curriculum and mission of the school is just as great."

During his career he taught a variety of science classes throughout the years, and serving as a dean was one step removed from his home of radiologic science. He said he loved being in the classroom, but the opportunities kept connecting to him. An opportunity is one of the reasons he came to MSU.

"I wanted to come to MSU because of the opportunity to research and teach, which reminded me of my interests," he said. "The community college doesn't discourage research and scholarly creative activities, but nor do they give you a lot of time for it."

He said coming to the university gave him those opportunities.

"I'd enjoyed the administrative part as dean; it'd been the opportunity to grow in more than just one classroom or one group of students, which I truly enjoy," he said.

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FACULTY HIGHLIGHT

DR. JAMES JOHNSTON

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Then the position as provost was offered to Johnston.

"I certainly believe that the committee and the president brought very strong finalists to campus, each of them were capable to get the job done," he said. "Fortunately, the university saw that I was the fit for where we are today with faculty and administration."

While at first Johnston said he felt a little nervous, he said he was also very excited about having to be in an office at the same time with Shipley for official business.

"There's a negotiation process with the president prior to the formal announcements," he said. "When it's announced to the world, then there is an element where it's real now."

He said he was at a meeting in the health and sciences department when he received an overwhelming response from faculty, staff, and friends.

"Beginning with that formal announcement at the academic honors banquet, being a part of it, others congratulating me, wishing me well – it was a great day."

Story written by Leonardo Gonzalez and originally published in The Wichitan.

GET TO KNOW THE PROVOST

- **Favorite color:** "Shades of blue."
- **Favorite food:** "I'm addicted to the steak that I cook."
- **Favorite movie(s):** "Dancing with Wolves, and for my hopeless romantic side, The Notebook."
- **Favorite music:** "I appreciate all music, it just depends – I can go from Zac Brown Band to Dr. Martin Camacho's classical music."
- **Hobby:** "Raise and breed Arabian horses, also been riding competitively for six years, my wife introduced it to me when we got married and she's been raising and breeding horses since she was about eight years old."
- **Favorite MSU tradition:** "I try not to miss the fish fry and the boat race, but tailgates and homecoming overall just reminds me of the social part when I was a student."
- **Favorite place on campus:** "I love the serenity and feeling around the fountain, it represents so much of MSU's history."
- **If you were stranded on an island, what thing would you bring:** "It's one of those situations where social media and stuff I can live without; I don't consider my horses a 'thing' either; it's not a thing, but I'd bring my wife."

Additional reporting by Honors Program student Kara McIntyre

STAFF UPDATE



The Honors Program staff is excited to announce that we have a new Coordinator! Cody Parish, MSU Honors Program graduate from 2013, joined the Honors team this summer:

My name is **CODY PARISH**, and I'm excited to be back with the MSU Honors Program — this time behind the desk! I

graduated from MSU as an Honors student in 2013 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, and then I stuck around for the following year to earn a degree in English. Afterwards, I attended graduate school at

Illinois State University, earning a Master of Arts in English: Literary and Cultural Studies in August, 2016. It was probably one of the most enjoyable and stressful experiences of my life. For this past year, I returned to MSU and taught English composition courses, during which time I had the pleasure of meeting a few of you. Now, I'm looking forward to serving as the new Honors Program Coordinator. There will be games and merriment and conferences, and many, many jokes! So, I'm excited to meet you all, to teach some of you in the Leadership course, and, most importantly, to help you succeed during your time at Midwestern as members of the Honors Program.

Model United Nations Team

THE MSU MODEL UNITED NATIONS TEAM competed in March 2017 at the national collegiate Model United Nations Conference, an event that draws teams from across the globe, and they represented MSU exceptionally well. For the first time in MSUMUN history, we won awards, at the national level. Two students won individual awards and the team received an Honorable Mention Delegation award.

Model UN is a learning simulation in which students role play the delegation of a country in the United Nations. This year we were Peru. Students serve on various committees organized by policy area, and they are charged with developing solutions to existing global problems such as educational development, access to medical care, use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes and the flow of refugees, to mention just a few. Model UN epitomizes the core mission of a Liberal Arts curriculum in that it is a multi-disciplinary activity requiring students to conduct independent research, critically examine a real world problem, develop a solution to this problem, and then convince their competitors that their solution is the most effective. This high-impact learning practice requires students to utilize research, critical thinking, communication, and, most importantly, leadership skills. To be successful students must speak publicly on their solution, as well as build coalitions of supporters to have it adopted.

This year the team was comprised of students from all six colleges and this multi-disciplinary make up was instrumental in the team's success. Students began preparing in the fall semester and devoted numerous hours to independent, extensive research and writing. Specifically, students had to create position papers, 1-2 page documents representing our country's position on key policy questions. This year we had two students win Outstanding Position Paper awards. Natalia Zamora Garcia won an award for her paper in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Honors Program student Dareem Antoine won an award for his paper in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This commitment continues at the conference as the proceedings begin with breakfast and typically do not end until well after midnight. To be successful our team must be present and actively involved in the proceedings. The Honorable Mention Delegation Award indicated that each member of each committee had a significant impact on this week's proceedings at each step of the process. This is the equivalent of third place, a significant accomplishment given the level of competition. To put this accomplishment in perspective, over 5,000 students attend the national MUN conference and over half are typically from outside the US. This week the MSUMUN team elevated MSU to the international stage.



All photos are taken from MSU's Political Science Twitter feed

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Model United Nations Team

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2016-2017 MSU Model UN Team (* marks students in the Honors Program)

TEAM MEMBER	MAJOR	COLLEGE
Luke Allen*	Political Science & Spanish	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Dareem Antoine*	Economics & Math	Dillard & Science & Mathematics
Ashley Ates	Global Studies	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Morgan Barnes*	Management	Dillard College of Business Administration
Erica Brown*	Early Childhood	Gordon T. and Ellen West College of Education
Tyler Garcia	Political Science	Prothro-Yeager
Dean Hart	Theater	Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts
Andrea Mendoza Lespron*	English	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Faith Munoz	English	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Maria Pena	Political Science	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Kelsey Purcell*	Mass Communications	Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts
Kyle Walsh*	Radiology	Robert D. and Carol Gunn College of Health Sciences & Human Services
Natalia Zamora Garcia	Political Science & Global Studies	Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Originally published by The Office of Public Information at MSU

In addition to providing information about MSU's accomplishments at the Model UN competition, we wanted to share an Honors student's perspective of the event. Kelsey Purcell shares her diverse experience at Model UN in an editorial for MSU's student paper *The Wichitan* below:



MODEL UN TAKES NYC

Kelsey Purcell, Honors Program Junior majoring in Mass Communication

My week in New York City with the Model U.N. team is a week I will never forget. Before leaving for The Big Apple, I was more anxious than excited. My major is mass communication, where I study things like social media trends, targets audiences for advertising and how to make short films, so as I'm sure you can imagine, "foreign policy" seemed more like a "foreign language" to me. However, I'm getting ahead of myself here. First, let me explain what exactly Model U.N. is.

Model U.N. stands for Model United Nations. I'm going to assume, like me prior to joining the team, most people have a knowledge of Model U.N. that extends only to its appearance in an episode of Parks and Recreation (if that). Basically my team and I spent all year studying Peru, the country we were assigned, and Peru's viewpoints on various world issues. Like the actual United Nations, our team was divided up into committees. Naturally, the girl who always has a smile on her face and does not even own a gun (*cough cough* me) was assigned to the General Assembly 1, which deals with nuclear weapons and small arms. I learned all there is to know about bombs and other weapons from the perspective of Peru all year (actually, not really, but I tried).

The week before spring break, most students spent time daydreaming about their vacations and all of the eye-candy they'd be seeing at the beach — but not me. Instead, I spent that week taking exams early, collecting and completing all of the work I'd be missing, and meeting with all of my professors about how I'd be missing a week of class (yes, an entire week of class. I never miss school. Gosh, that stressed me out). "All of this effort, and I'm just going to go there and make a fool out of myself," I thought. People already assume I'm an idiot because of my blonde hair and bubbly personality, and I felt as though I was about to go prove them right.

However, the conference turned out to be amazing. There were about 6,000 students from 131 different countries participating. There were so many different cultures coming together in unison to compromise and find common ground, which is the very essence of the United Nations. It was beautiful. I made friends with students from China, Canada, Germany, and Colorado (to name a few). Through conversations, I saw they have a different way of life in each of those countries/states, each differing from my own, but truly opening my eyes to other opinions. But I also learned the people I had travelled with from right here in Wichita Falls were not like myself, either, yet we became friends.

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Model UN Takes NYC

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I spent most of my time with a few people, and each was uniquely special to me. First, there was Morgan, my old roommate from last year. Morgan is sarcastic and hilarious, and she even earned herself the nickname “Chuckles.” Sometimes at night when we’d stay up late talking, she would get tired and become short with me by responding with one-word replies (which led to a burst of laughter).

Second, there was Erica. Erica is normally pretty quiet, but I think NYC did her some good and brought out a side of her I really like. Erica is the only one who was open to singing karaoke impulsively with me every time I would burst into song; she was my cuddle buddy as we walked down the street in 20-degree weather; she is someone I could cry with; and she was the target of many third-wheel jokes that gave her the nickname “Single.”

Third, there was Dareem. Dareem has such a confidence about him. He speaks so eloquently, but he also knows how to loosen up and have a good time. Dareem is kind to everyone, and I think that is why he is so likable.

Next, there was Dean. Let me just say that I love me some Dean. His background in theater shined through with his quick wits and sassy attitude, which always allowed for someone to be drastically burned, unable to come up with a rebuttal.

Then there was Ashley. Ashley was my partner for the GA1, and let me just say, she was definitely the brains behind the operation. She is incredibly smart, and I am privileged to have worked with her. She made me feel secure when I was lacking confidence, and she made me laugh during those long formal sessions.

I also spent time with Tyler. Tyler is a fraternity guy with the confidence of a Kardashian. He was the selfie king, a persuasive prankster and he took longer to get ready in the morning than any of the girls in our group. If Tyler had not been on our team, I don’t think we would have experienced New York like we did; he encouraged us all to go out of our comfort zones.

Lastly there was Kyle. Man, what can I say about Kyle? He certainly knows how to take a joke (he had to with our group). Kyle is a free spirit, and hearing his stories of how he likes to..umm.. “live life to the fullest” led to tears streaming from our eyes in uncontrollable laughter.

Others on our team included; Maria, a kind soul; Natalia, who introduced us to some amazing Peruvian food; Faith, whose name represents all she stands for (which I love); and Luke and Andrea, who I have to name together since they are practically joined at the hip.

Overall, the trip was one I will never forget. Experiencing the National Model U.N. Conference, seeing things like Central Park and a Broadway musical and the 9/11 Memorial, and casually sneaking out for some late-night desserts at Carlos’ Bakery were all fantastic memories. However, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that getting to know these beautiful people was my favorite memory. Unlikely friends were brought together by what some would call circumstance, but I’ll call it fate.

Story written by Honors Program student Kelsey Purcell and originally published in The Wichitan.

Honors Fun Facts from 2017

103 total students in the Honors Program

71 students from Texas
1 student from Florida
1 student from Illinois
2 students from Oklahoma
1 student from Pennsylvania
1 student from Washington

26 International Students:

1 from Antigua
1 from Barbados
1 from Colombia
2 from Dominica
1 from Gambia
2 from Germany
7 from Grenada
3 from Italy
1 from Lebanon

1 from Mexico
1 from The Netherlands
2 from Nigeria
1 from Pakistan
1 from Sri Lanka
1 from St. Lucia

Honors Program Student **Megan Piehler** Delivers Commencement Address



Megan Piehler, mass communication senior and former student regent, attends the Board of Regents meeting held in the Board Room in Hardin Building on Nov. 12, 2015.

Photo by Rachel Johnson

ABOUT 692 students adorned in caps and gowns walked the stage at Kay Yeager Coliseum at 10 a.m. on May 13, 2017. Megan Piehler, Honors Program Mass Communication senior, was chosen as the first student commencement speaker in MSU's history.

"Dr. Shipley [university president] mentioned to the commencement committee that she wanted to incorporate students and the student perspective into graduation. Someone mentioned the Hardin Scholar would be a good representative of the student perspective, and the committee agreed that I would be a good fit, having already spoken as the keynote speaker at the 2015 President's Excellence Circle Dinner and the 2016 Maroon and Gold Connection," Piehler said.

After university officials released the announcement on April 25, Piehler said she was surprised and honored by the news.

"I was completely shocked to be chosen as the commencement speaker. You hear about CEOs, ambassadors and Nobel Peace Prize winners giving commencement speeches, so this is something I never even dreamt of having the opportunity to do during my lifetime," Piehler said. "It is humbling to be given the opportunity to speak to so many fellow graduates who are going to go on and change the world."

She said she received a lot of support from family, friends and colleagues, especially on Facebook where the announcement was posted.

"The amount of support I've received has been overwhelming," Piehler said.

Piehler earned the Clark Scholar award in 2015 and was named the Hardin Scholar in 2016, which are the two highest academic awards given by the university. She also served as the 2015-2016 Student Regent. She was a member of Student Government Association and the Redwine Honors Program Student Committee, and she served SGA as senator for the American Advertising Federation. She was named Outstanding Freshman Woman in 2014, Outstanding Junior Woman in 2015, Clark Scholar in 2015, Outstanding Senior Woman in 2016, Outstanding Honors Program Student Alumni Award in 2016, Woman of the Year in 2017 and Outstanding Mass Communication Student in 2017.

She is also a member of Alpha Chi National College Honor Society and Gamma Phi Beta sorority, where she was named Outstanding Scholar in 2014. She has presented at the National Model UN Conference in New York and the Great Plains Honors Conference in South Padre, Texas. She received a scholarship from the Advertising Education Foundation of Houston and American Advertising Federation-Houston.

Piehler said she is most looking forward to using this opportunity to encourage her peers and other graduation attendees.

"Because I was homeschooled, I've actually never been in an official commencement ceremony, but I certainly never envisioned myself speaking at graduation. I feel incredibly blessed and honored to be the first student commencement speaker, but I also feel a certain level of responsibility to make my graduating class and university proud. MSU has given me so many opportunities and has challenged me to grow in multiple ways," Piehler said. "My experiences with MSU have equipped me with the confidence to change the world and this commencement speech is a surreal and exciting beginning."

Story written by Honors Program student Kara McIntyre and originally published in The Wichitan.

Research Highlights from Current Students

For this edition of the newsletter, we would like to share research highlights from the Symposium as recorded by a reporter for *The Wichitan*. We were thrilled to have our event covered by the student paper this year, and it allowed the MSU community to see the event from the perspective of the student presenters. The Honors Student Committee members work hard to put this event on each spring, and *The Wichitan* did a great job of highlighting our outstanding Honors students. This year was the 11th annual Symposium.

Skellington, Spiral Galaxies, Symposium, Oh My!



A crowd of approximately 40 show up to watch students give their presentations during the 11th Annual Redwine Honors Program Symposium on March 25. Photo by Arianna Davis

PURE BLACK ATTIRE clothed her body and echoed the eerie tone of the film. While she wanted to appear as a shadow of the character in the movie, Honors Program English junior Margaret Greenhalgh said she ultimately wanted to weave her presentation between fond memories of childhood and emphasis on leadership, rather than elicit screams from the audience like the Pumpkin King would. As she walked towards the front of the room, she fixed the back of her Jack Skellington earrings one last time before she dissected the twisted Tim Burton film, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and explained why exactly Skellington ruled Halloween Town.

Five Honors students presented a wide range of research topics at the 11th Annual Redwine Honors Program Symposium on March 25.

While Greenhalgh not only opened the presentations with analysis of the character strengths of Jack Skellington in “Spook-tacular Leadership,” she also concluded the presentations with “Honors Music Appreciation” by illuminating various progressions of music masterpieces throughout history. She presented her work on “Honors Music Appreciation,” along with fellow Honors student Katelyn Bowles, the following week at the Great Plains Honors Conference in Beaumont, TX, as well.

“I must have rehearsed both presentations 20 times yesterday while pacing back and forth all day, thinking, ‘what did I get myself into?’” Greenhalgh said. “The projects were interesting and extremely diverse, so I think the event went very well.”

The Honors Program Symposium allows Honors students to present research topics on a range of interests. Honors Program Business Management sophomore Hanna Gebel focused her 10-minute presentation on “Alfred Hitchcock’s Objectification of Women in Auteuristic Cinematics.” She also went on to present at the Great Plains Honors Conference.

“Throughout his movies, Hitchcock continued to drive his focus on male dominance, and I chose the movies *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho* to show this,” Gebel said during her presentation.

According to Gebel, her research was driven from Hitchcock’s relationship with actress Tippi Hedren, and his alleged obsession with her to express the connections between his cinematography and genuine infatuations.

Honors Program student and Teaching Assistant Sachithra Weerasooriya and Jacqueline Dunn, Associate Professor of Physics, worked together to research correlations between dwarf spiral, dwarf elliptical and dwarf irregular galaxies, and Weerasooriya presented their findings in her presentation entitled “Investigating Dwarf Spiral Galaxies.” The initial results in the presentation indicated a potential evolutionary link that merits further investigation, Weerasooriya said. Weerasooriya presented her research in the form of a poster presentation at the Great Plains Honors Conference as well.

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Research Highlights from Current Students

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Along the science presentations, Honors Program Biology senior Cody O'Donnell presented "Low-Intensity Venous Occlusion Training, an Effective Post-Surgical Recovery Exercise" by analyzing a pilot study.

"While the study had fewer participants than preferred, the outcomes produced significant evidence for the training," O'Donnell said. "I have spent so much time with this research it almost feels like I'm a part of it, but I'm not. I do find the research fascinating, however."

Visual aids that allowed the audience to engage in the research were used in each presentation, which helped the audience follow the presentations more effectively.

Like Greenhalgh, Honors Program Cellular Biology sophomore Nathaniel Shawver used his wardrobe to emphasize his topic on "Leadership as a Function of Color." According to Shawver, the colors red, blue, navy, gold, black and white all manifest emotions that are necessary for leaders to seem "not abrasive, but assertive."

"I particularly liked the pair of the colors: gold as a lead color of my tie with a blue suit as the medium," he said. "Plus I like this tie because it has my instrument on it: the French horn."

According to Shawver, his presentation came together through comparing vintage superhero costumes that depicted bright, stark difference in colors of pure blues and reds, to more muddled colors which he said mimicked the world's view on righteousness and honor "introducing more gray into the mix" where things aren't so black and white as they once were.

Assistant Director of the Honors Program Juliana Felts said about 40 people attended the presentations and faculty panel that followed. Through the last 11 years, Felts said the students "always deliver an interesting approach" to topics while entertaining the audience.

"It's incredible to see these students talk about their interests in such a way that people who aren't in their fields can understand what they are talking about, even a little bit," she said.

Story written by Courtney Wood and originally published in The Wichitan.

Brains and Brawn

Luke Allen- Cycling
William Ash- Cycling
Skye Catletti- Basketball
Cortnie Grauel- Cross Country/Track
Kaitlyn Kyle- Softball
Lizzie Navarette- Soccer
Joshua Nowell- Football
Simon Ospina- Golf
Kelsey Purcell- Volleyball

Featured Alumni

Our featured alumni this year are **CHAZ** and **SARAH BRANCH**. They met each other in the Honors Program at MSU, and the rest is history, as you will read below! Both Chaz and Sarah (formerly Hugman) were in the Honors Program at MSU from 2002 through 2006:



Sarah and Chaz pictured here with their two adorable kids Levi, age 5 and Tessa, age 3

-Please give us some background on yourself and describe what you are doing now and what you have been doing since you left MSU:

SARAH – Growing up, I enjoyed some of the typical childhood activities like playing outside with friends until dark, participating in sports like soccer, and playing clarinet in the band. I had a good childhood with a lot of happy memories. School was something that I excelled at – but only because I worked hard at it. I was not one that could “wing a test,” or at least I was too anxious to ever allow myself to try. I would often spend hours studying and preparing for tests at night in high school because I wanted to get every answer right when test day came. My parents never really put this expectation on me, it was just something burning inside of me that I had to do! It was also important to me to spend time with friends and participate in band and sports in order to have a healthy balance of work and play. In high school, I got involved in a PAL Program – Peer Assistance and Leadership – where I met with younger students as a mentor – and this shaped a desire in me to begin an educational path that would allow me to help others as a career. I was paired up with an elementary aged student during that time who was very sad and lonely at school and he expressed that talking with someone made him feel better. I knew I had to do more with this and so when I enrolled at MSU, I began my education in psychology with a minor in sociology. It might be important to note here that I would not have been able to attend Midwestern at all if it had not been for the financial scholarships that were awarded to me through the Honors Program and the Leadership

Scholars Programs. During the summer leading up to the start of school, my dad was laid off from his job and my parents were thinking that I might need to postpone college until my family was back on our feet. The financial help from the scholarships allowed me to still enroll and pursue my goals, something that was not otherwise guaranteed. I had wonderful professors during my time in the psychology department at MSU and they were influential in my choosing to continue in a career in Marriage and Family Therapy after I graduated from MSU. I was accepted into the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Abilene Christian University in 2006 and I am now a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Over the years, I have counseled couples and families within the context of private practice and also counseled families as an Infant Mental Health Specialist through Early Childhood Intervention. Currently, I am the Clinical Lead for the Early Childhood Services Division of MHMR of Tarrant County. In this role, I train and guide our staff in serving families with children up to six years of age who are experiencing difficulties with behavioral or developmental concerns. Our ultimate goal is to strengthen families, prevent child abuse and neglect, and increase awareness about the importance of social emotional competence of young children.

CHAZ – Education has always been something of value to me. Though my parents never put a lot of pressure on specific grades, I was raised with a sense that being an avid learner could open doors to anything. Neither of my parents attended college; however, both were successful in their careers from hard work, intuition, and extracurricular research and study on their part. Both my parents taught me the importance of being an ethical, hard worker in whatever I was doing, whether that was band, choir, athletics, English class, etc. I learned to pour myself into whatever task I was given, whatever job I obtained, or whatever class I was attending.

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FEATURED ALUMNI

(continued from page 13)



Choosing Midwestern and being accepted into the Honors Program, along with the Leaders Scholarship Program, helped strengthen my passion for education. The Honors Program classes were taught by professors who had deep desires for students to think and grow. Our teachers challenged us more than most general classroom teachers. I remember being placed in a group with other Honors students that were instructed to take turns navigating the campus in a wheel chair in order to challenge our perspective; tasked to pick, practice, and teach a short lesson on an alternative healing method in the Art and Healing class; and a variety of forums and lectures outside of the general course curriculum. It is through these experiences in the Honors Program that I learned to look beyond my current task or position and think more creatively.

After completing my student teaching and graduating from Midwestern in December of 2006, I went on to teach as a long-term substitute teacher for the band program at Anson ISD in Anson, TX. That next fall, I was offered a position in Colorado City, TX, as the Assistant Band Director, where I began my full-time teaching career. In 2008, I became the Head Band Director at Colorado Middle School, where my focus became more on building the middle school program, while still assisting at the High School. That year, Sarah and I got married, our High School Band advanced to State Marching Contest, and our middle school band received Division One Ratings and earned Sweepstakes for the first time in many years. Those experiences during my first few years teaching helped to shape and strengthen my passion for music education. I was also given the privilege to develop a digital media class where students learned advanced computer skills, photo manipulation, and podcasting. This was another great opportunity, as I am a big fan of educational technology. I remained at Colorado City for the next 7 years. As our family began to grow, Sarah and I desired to be closer to family and I accepted a position with Tarpley Music Company as an Educational Representative. We relocated to Granbury, TX, where I began connecting with Central Texas school band programs to expand Tarpley Music Company's services. Even though my position is built around sales, one of my favorite aspects of this career is being a resource for educators. I visit nearly 40 schools a week and get to communicate with educators on what works in specific classes, how to overcome certain obstacles in education, and take those ideas to other teachers. After my first year on the road for Tarpley, I was invited into the Tarpley Music Company Leadership Team. This team has helped create amazing resources, products, and services for music educators. I am greatly privileged to be among so many great thinkers.

-How did you meet?

SARAH – Chaz and I met on our first day of school at Midwestern – during our Monday 8am Honors course actually. He introduced himself to me that morning and I looked forward to seeing him Wednesday when the class would meet again. However, we saw each other sooner than that because as it turned out we were also both enrolled in the MSU Leadership Course that met later that day. From that day forward, it was an instant friendship. I found in him a friend that was like-minded in so many ways – someone who valued working hard at school to do well with a love for learning new things - but also someone who wanted to have good old fashion fun like bike riding, bowling, puzzles, and roller blading, among other things. He and I stayed best friends for 3 years, each the constant in each other's lives as boyfriends/girlfriends came and went for us. As fate would have, we found ourselves both single for the first time going in to our senior year and something unexpected happened – a realization that what we had found with one another could not be allowed to get away. As Chaz puts it, he realized he could not live without me in his life and it turns out, I felt the same way. Sappy, I know, but that is the stuff of strong marriages! I love to remember those early days when it became clear to us that a relationship built on such a solid friendship could withstand just about anything. He followed me to Abilene as I completed my Masters program in Marriage and Family Therapy and he became a Director of Bands at the Middle School in Colorado City, TX. Once I finished my masters program in 2008, we finally were able to get married. So, we've been married for 9 wonderful years and have made a lot of fun memories but some of the most precious ones are from our time together at MSU.

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FEATURED ALUMNI

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-To what extent were you involved in Honors, outside of the Honors courses?

We attended a variety of Honors-hosted events at the Honors house and around campus; worked at the Artist Lecture series events with many friends in the Honors Program.

-Favorite Honors Program memory for each of you?

Rather than a specific event standing out, the biggest impact of participating in the Honors program for us comes from being around the same students for many of the courses. Many of those students we consider to be lifelong friends. We all live and work in separate places (some in different countries), but we still communicate with one another.

-Favorite Honors course for each of you?

The Honors intro course stands out because that is when we met each other, as well as other friends. We also enjoyed the last capstone course with Dr. Farris and the Art and History class.

-In what way(s) did participating in Honors prepare you for leaving MSU?

By nature, the Honors Program strengthened our already present initiative and drive. The program reinforced our abilities and kept us strong throughout our time at MSU. The classes were geared towards discussion and student input, rather than being lectured at! That structure enabled us to think critically on the topics at hand.

-If you could give advice to current students in the program, what would it be?

Invest effort into your friendships with those in the Honors Program – they will be lifelong friends and forward thinking colleagues!



MSU Alumni Association Outstanding Honors Program Students

<i>Cody Cole</i>1994	<i>Jeffrey (Mark) Fleming</i>2001	<i>Liam Guthrie</i>2010
<i>Chandra Rodgers</i>1994	<i>Nyian Farrell</i>2002	<i>Ashley Gravelle</i> 2011
<i>Melissa Miller</i>1995	<i>Shonna Diggs</i>2003	<i>Kyle Christian</i>2012
<i>Paul (Andrew) Fleming</i>1995	<i>Adam McMahan</i>2004	<i>Kistel Hazel</i>2013
<i>Jamie Benefield</i>1996	<i>Marie Ibarra</i>2005	<i>Emily Baudot</i>2014
<i>Jason Lawrence</i>1997	<i>Laura Rachael Kair</i>2006	<i>Joseph Hadwal</i>2015
<i>Paul Mussachio</i>1998	<i>Erin Kathleen Short</i>2007	<i>Megan Piehler</i>2016
<i>Danielle Roney</i>1999	<i>Jonathan Abel</i>2008	<i>Luke Allen</i>2017
<i>Jennifer Veitenheimer</i>2000	<i>Chelsea Humphrey</i>2009	

HONORS STUDENT COMMITTEE OFFICERS SPRING 2017

Andrea Mendoza-Lespron, Chair
Luke Saunders, Vice Chair
Luke Allen, Senator
Beth Russell, Secretary
Brooke Benson, Treasurer

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?
 SEND US AN E-MAIL!

We would love to hear from more alumni at Honors@mwsu.edu! We hope many of you will continue to keep in touch with us, and we look forward to sharing your stories in the future.

Honors Graduates 2016

SPRING 2016

Jonathan Henderson
Lindsey Johnson
Kristin Lanier
Michelle Lear

Madeline Parker
Suprena Poleon
Jennifer Sissel
Alicia Ward

SUMMER 2016

Shikemi Olowofela

FALL 2016

Caitlin McNeely
Sarah Naumann
Caleb Nichols